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The establishment, airlift, and deployment of a task force for a post-riot area: the Soviet experience in Temirtau, 1959.

The article, based on previously obscure archival documents, provides a description and analysis of the measures taken by the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to uphold public order in Temirtau (Kazakhstan) after a mass riot was suppressed there in August, 1959. [1]

Keywords: Temirtau, riot, riot control, Internal Troops, Soviet, MVD, airlift, task force, stability operations, 1959.

The body of literature on post-1945 riot control offers quite a number of unclassified works giving a detailed picture of how the United States Army and National Guard dealt with the issues pertaining to the troop build-up to counter civil disturbances[2].

Totally different is the present state of research in the field of similar Soviet experience, where official papers on riot control are declassified at a snail's pace, if declassified at all[3]. This is why the declassified archival material on the events of 1959 in the Soviet town of Temirtau, located in Karaganda (Qaraghandy) region (*oblast')* of Kazakhstan, becomes especially valuable to at least partly fill this gap.

Since the riot itself was quelled before the arrival of the task force that is the primary concern of this study, the description of the disturbances will be limited to the most basic facts. [4]

The beginning of August, 1959, witnessed Temirtau being badly shaken by social unrest. Unsatisfactory living conditions provided for the worker teams employed in the construction of the Karaganda steel plant, finally took their toll, and lots of ordinary people formed an angry mob. Joined by local hoodlums, they embarked upon a pogrom of the town's newest district, which was both a construction site and the workers' temporary residence area.

After some initial confusion, the authorities rushed in police reinforcements, backed by troops from the Karaganda prison camp.[5] According to official stats, the actions taken to restore order resulted in 16 civilian fatalities – the figure including both the people killed on the spot and those who later succumbed to gunshot wounds. 27 rioters were injured. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) suffered no KIAs, but, with 109 servicemen wounded,[6] also paid a heavy price.

Finding personnel for a stability operation

It was 1000 hours 3 August, when Minister of Internal Affairs Nikolay Dudorov ordered his subordinates to deploy 1,000-1,200 Internal Troops servicemen to the troubled area by the end of

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[1] The original version of this study was first published in Russian in 2013 (see: http://otvaga2004.ru/voyny/wars-ussr/temirtau-1959).

[2] See, for instance: Scheips, Paul J. The role of federal military forces in domestic disorders, 1945–1992. Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington D.C., 2012; Military support of law enforcement during civil disturbances. A report concerning the California National Guard's part in suppressing the Los Angeles riot, August 1965. California: State Printing, n.d.

[3] In the latter scenario, even taking it to court does not help. I lost cases against the Ministry of Defense (at the district court level and at the City Court of Moscow) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the City Court of Moscow and the Supreme Court of Russia), despite the fact that the papers I wanted declassified date back to the 1950-1980s and must be made open to researchers under the 'Thirty year rule'.

[4] Those who would like to study the social and political aspects of this riot in detail are advised to use the standard reference work on the subject: Vladimir A. Kozlov. Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years, trans. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon. M.E. Sharpe, 2002, pp. 23-43.

[5] RGVA (*Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenniy Voenniy Arkhiv* – The Russian State Military Archive), fund 38651, inventory (*opis'*) 1, file 219, sheet 121.

[6] Vladimir A. Kozlov, Mass Uprisings in the USSR, p. 39.

the day.[7] The number was not excessive at all, for the hotbed of unrest alone housed more than 2,700 people in a tent campsite.
But the issue of assembling the necessary manpower was a headache. No rapid deployment MVD forces were available for many miles around Temirtau. The closest motorized rifle units, tasked to deal with emergencies, were based in Moscow (OMSDON[8]) and Tbilisi (unit 3219[9]). Airlifting them to Karaganda would take approximately 10 hours and would have to be a staged movement, which required even more time. Since Dudorov was afraid of a potential new outbreak of violence, he insisted on a speedier solution. [10]
The only alternative was to employ prison guard troops[11] from adjacent areas – that is, the Urals, Siberia, and Central Asia. The problem was that the units located there were overburdened with their service routine and had few soldiers to spare for a stability operation. Moreover, the units in the Urals and Siberia had a lot of their personnel on tours of duty in extremely remote prison camps.[12]
Still, it was decided to use this source of manpower, and the task to provide the troops was given to the 8th, 9th and 10th departments of the Internal and Convoy Guard. [13]

Actual name of the unit (classified at the time)	**Unit identification code (unclassified)**	**HQ**
8th department	unit 7477	Sverdlovsk
9th department	unit 7540	Novosibirsk
10th department	unit 7476	Tashkent

Fig. 1. General information about the departments involved in the troop build-up. [14]

Between 1300 and 1500 hours the commanders of the aforementioned departments received encrypted messages containing the order to assemble a particular number of servicemen (see Fig. 2) and prepare these personnel for airlift to Karaganda. The task was to be carried out in 2-4 hours, while the aim of the upcoming deployment was to be kept secret even from most senior officers. The emergency task force would comprise 1170 troops, including 112 officers. [15]

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[7] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 121, 150.
[8] *Otdel'naya Motostrelkovaya Diviziya Osobogo Naznacheniya imeni F.E.Dzerzhinskogo* — the F.E. Dzerzhinsky Independent Special Purpose Motorized Rifle Division.
[9] Like many Internal Troops units, this formation has frequently changed names during its long operational history. In 1959 it was known as the 19th Motorized Rifle Detachment of the Internal Guard (see note 13).
[10] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 151.
[11] At the time, the Internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs consisted of two uneven parts - the abovementioned motorized rifle units, mostly dealing with special circumstances like riots, counterinsurgency, natural disasters etc., and much more numerous troops guarding prison camps and providing justice prisoner transportation (the Convoy Guard). This division of duties, however, did not preclude prison guards from, i.e., patrolling streets, while motorized rifles could assume guards' functions.
[12] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 151.
[13] In 1951 the Internal troops were re-styled *Vnutrennie voyska, vnutrennyaya i konvoynaya okhrana* (the Internal troops, internal and convoy guard). Actual names of the units also changed, and, till 1968, a division would be known as *otdel* (department), a regiment – as *otryad* (detachment), a battalion as *divizion* (squadron), a company – as *komanda* (team). The actual name of the unit would also include its affiliation with either the Internal Guard (VO**)** or the Convoy Guard (KO). Here it is omitted since all departments were listed as VKO (the Internal and Convoy guard), and all other units belonged to the Convoy Guard.
[14] Otdely VO, KO, ViKO 1951-1968 g. URL: www.soldat.ru/files/f/1_otdeli_vo_i_ko_1951_68_1.doc
[15] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 122.

Actual name of the unit (classified at the time)	Unit identification code (unclassified)	Parent unit	Number of servicemen provided
53rd detachment	unit 7432	8th department	329
Training divizion	unit 7492		
56th detachment	unit 7406	9th department	218
26th detachment	unit 7455	10th department	623
Training divizion	unit 7599		
92nd independent divizion	в/ч 7552		

Fig. 2. Information about the units providing the troop quota for the task force. [16]

In addition to them, 106 cadets from the Alma Ata (Almaty) Border Guard School[17] and 200 cadets of the Alma Ata Police School were also to be dispatched to Karaganda. [18]
The task facing the officers in charge of the troop build-up was really daunting. Troops had to be hastily relieved of prisoner transportation and sentinel duties and temporarily replaced by the personnel who had not been previously assigned these tasks for the coming days. [19]

Logistical aspects
Haste impeded preparations for the expedition, and later the MVD superiors acknowledged that in a more aggressive operational environment some shortages resulting from the initial overall mess could have proved costly. [20]
To begin with, the task force possessed only 10 wireless sets. As a result, these were used mostly to keep in touch with the staffs, while the primary burden of maintaining communication was borne by phone lines and messengers[21].
Troops departed to the point of destination in their field uniforms, taking only a change of underwear and gas-casualty first-aid kits.[22] Such was the hurry that the personnel were issued no capes, which could later have facilitated the spread of common cold among the task force (five troops had to be hospitalized in Temirtau)[23].
Since there was no time to agree upon standardized specifications concerning the allowance of food and ammunition, the number of cartridges and rations issued to troops depended on commanders. For instance, troops hailing from the 9th department were issued 60 cartridges for every carbine and 141 cartridges for a Degtyaryov hand-held machine-gun (altogether there were 180 carbines and 17 machine-guns), while their fellow servicemen from the training divizion of the 10th department had 30 cartridges for every carbine and 120 cartridges for every machine-gun. The former group of troops had a five-day supply of rations, while the latter's allowance was limited to four days. [24]
No maps of the operational area were issued to the troops. [25]
The airlift began at 1800 hours on 3 August. It involved Il-14 aircraft provided by civil aviation, each plane accommodating 25-30 troops at a time. As a result, it required one lift to transport the

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[16] Based on the following: RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 122; fi.128, s. 1, 42.
[17] The School, like the abovementioned famous OMSDON, was named after F. Dzerzhinsky, which later led to speculations that it was the OMSDON that took part in riot control in Temirtau (see, for instance, http://statehistory.ru/978/Komsomolskiy-pogrom-v-Temirtau--1959-g-/).
[18] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 121.
[19] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 123.
[20] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 154.
[21] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 133.
[22] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 123 ; fi. 128, s. 91.
[23] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 141.
[24] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 123; fi. 128, s. 1.
[25] RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 128.

troops from the Urals and Siberia, while the most numerous contingent from the Tashkent Air Terminal went in two waves. Most troops were in Karaganda by the end of 3 August.[26]

Deployment and service

Before the departure the personnel were re-grouped into composite battalions, comprising 315 to 155 troops. Immediately on arrival to Karaganda the units formed the operative task force of the Chief directorate of the Internal and Convoy Troops, commanded by Col. Mikhaylov, deputy commander of the 1st department of the of the Internal and Convoy Guard. The task force included five composite battalions, an independent company of the Border Guard School cadets, an HQ Security platoon, the supply and communications service, and a medical station, later joined by a motorized group (a company operating trucks seconded to the task force). [27]

Major General Tereshchenko, deputy head of the Chief directorate of the Internal and Convoy Troops, was appointed the operation's officer-in-command. On 4 August, he also assumed the functions of the garrison commander in Temirtau. [28]

The airlifted troops were moved from Karaganda to Temirtau by trucks borrowed by the regional police department from a variety of local organizations.[29] Schools and a club provided temporary housing for the soldiers, while three hot meals a day became the responsibility of the canteens of *Kazmetallurgstroy* – the organization in charge of construction works. [30]

The task force immediately took several important objects in Temirtau under protection, including the thermoelectric plant, the blast furnace, and explosives depots, to prevent possible sabotage and looting. Sentry groups comprised 15 to 30 servicemen, depending on the assessment of the particular operational environment by the command.

The post-riot area was divided into sectors patrolled by particular battalions on a round-the-clock basis. Originally 730 troops were made available for the task, providing both mobile and stationary patrols of two and three soldiers. However, by the evening of 5 August the situation in general stabilized which led to a radical scaling down of daytime patrols and allowed to place sentries in important objects only for nighttime hours. [31]

By the time the task force arrived the aggressive mob had already ceased to exist. Still, from time to time servicemen encountered the necessity to neutralize armed criminals, suppress various acts of individual and group violence and hunt down the key perpetrators of recent unrest. For the latter task, information was provided not only by the police and KGB, but also by ordinary citizens. On the other hand, some of the locals were not that cooperative and pushed their luck by assaulting the patrolmen and (unsuccessfully) trying to get hold of their weapons. [32]

On 10 August the task force was disbanded, and the next day most of the soldiers were moved back to their original units by passenger trains[33] (border guards had already departed for Alma Ata on 6 August[34]). The remaining 331 troops under the command of Lt. Col. G.T. Romanov constituted a composite battalion, subordinated to the chief of the police, Karaganda region, and remained in Temirtau till 24 September.[35] Their withdrawal concluded the stability operation.

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26 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 124-125.
27 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 123, 126-127.
28 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 122, 127.
29 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 125.
30 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 141.
31 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 127-131, 133-134.
32 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 134-137, 146.
33 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 142.
34 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 134.
35 RGVA, f. 38651, i. 1, fi. 219, s. 143, 150.